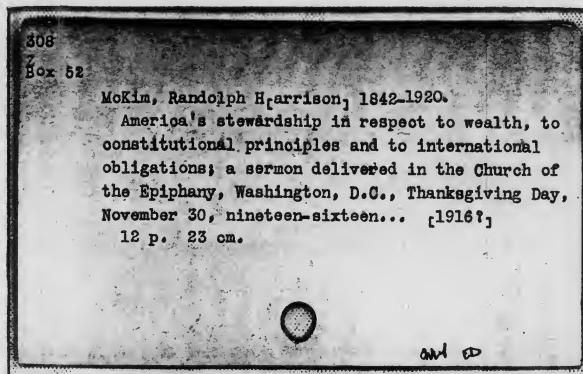


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# America's Stewardship

In Respect to Wealth, to Constitutional  
Principles and to International  
Obligations



## A Sermon

Delivered in the Church of the Epiphany  
Washington, D. C.



Thanksgiving Day, November 30  
nineteen-sixteen



By the Rector  
The Rev. Randolph H. McKim, D.D., LL.D.

Published by Request

## America's Stewardship

A SERMON.

*"Give account of thy Stewardship."—Luke XVI, 2.*

We meet this morning in accordance with a time-honored custom to make public acknowledgment of the blessings of Divine Providence which our country has enjoyed during the past year. Abundant harvests have crowned the labors of the husbandman. The laborer has had steady employment at unusually high wages. Factories, old and new, have been running at top speed. The railroads have been prosperous. The hum of industry has been heard on every hand. In fact, a great wave of prosperity has swept over our broad land. As a result of all this, and especially of the immense war contracts, some people have made great fortunes. Never, perhaps, has the wealth of the country been as great as it now is. Besides all this, we have been free from any widespread epidemic, and we have been at peace—or, at least, no great war has desolated our borders and swept to the grave hecatombs of our citizen soldiers.

It would seem, then, that our great Republic has unusual cause for offering its tribute of praise and thanksgiving to the bountiful Giver of all good.

Yes, God has been good to us. We have abundant reason to raise our hymns of adoration to His holy name for all the benefits He has bestowed upon us.

But, Thanksgiving Day has another function. It calls us to self-judgment. And for this reason: every blessing we enjoy has graven on the obverse side "responsibility." Every gift of God is also a talent to be accounted for. And so the greater the gift the more serious is the responsibility. It follows that if today we must recognize that the American people have been blessed with unusual prosperity, then so much the greater, so much the more compelling, is the responsibility for which they must give account.

Having this in view, I have taken as my text these words,

*"Give account of thy Stewardship."*

The clear message we should lay to heart today is this: Let the American people consider well the responsibilities

laid upon them by the abundant gifts of Divine Providence, and ask themselves how far they have been faithful to the stewardship entrusted to them? These abundant gifts have opened many doors of opportunity,—let our people ask themselves how far they have bravely and faithfully seized and improved these opportunities?

1. Consider first *the stewardship of wealth*. Great stores of wealth have been poured into the lap of America. How is she using them? A friend of mine, recently returned from one of the great centers of American life, said to me: "The extravagance one sees on every hand is simply appalling!" Never since the world began has the world been so full of suffering and sorrow and want and pain, as today. From Belgium and Servia and Armenia and Poland the cries of the homeless and the hungry and the desolate go up to heaven. From countless hospitals, from smoking ruins of once happy homes, from deserts where helpless women and children are starving, from fields and factories where men and women and young girls are working in involuntary servitude under hard taskmasters, the piteous supplication ascends for food and clothing—for every necessary of life, —above all, for liberty!

What has America done in answer to that cry? To these bleeding, suffering, starving peoples, what has been our response?

Millions of money have been given, and much personal service has been given. Yes, many have given most generously even out of their poverty—many have even laid down their lives in doing service for the sick and the wounded, and the needy.

But the vast majority of our people have given little or nothing, so that when we set on one side our swollen wealth, and on the other the sum total of our contributions to the sufferers in Europe and Asia, we see that as a nation we have done pitifully little. Australia has done more for the Belgian sufferers than this great, rich nation of ours. Many parts of our country seem quite untouched by this unprecedented misery and want of the world. The awful war that is desolating the human race seems to leave them indifferent and apathetic. It is as if millions of our people were playing the part of the rich fool in the parable, and saying:

"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease; eat, drink and be merry!"

Meanwhile, what of the manhood of the nation? Is its fibre waxing stronger or weaker? Are its ideals purer, nobler, more inspiring? Or are they waxing ignoble and unworthy?

Our Bishops have warned us that "unconsecrated prosperity is bound to cause manhood to decay"; and they add:

"If America comes out of this day of world disorder richer in purse and poorer in manhood, she will invite the penalty of a debased national life, or even of losing her own soul. The peace that smothers the soul is as ruthless and inexorable as the war that mangles the bodies of its victims."

Yes, my brethren, for well has the poet warned us—

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

2. Consider next the *Stewardship of Republican Government* bequeathed to us by our forefathers. Remember what our fathers did in the American Revolution. They abolished autocratic, personal government, and substituted a government founded on liberty and justice,—a government of the people,—a representative government speaking and acting through men chosen by the people to represent them, to make laws for them according to the mind of the people, without any class distinction. This solemn function of legislation was to be exercised under oath, in the fear of God, with careful investigation and deliberate consideration for the good of the whole people.

Now I ask how this sacred trust has been kept? How has this stewardship of Republican government been exercised by the American people during the past year?

The answer that must be made is that in one conspicuous instance this stewardship has been betrayed by our legislators. We have seen the high function of legislation exercised in unseemly haste,—without full investigation, without due consideration,—and not with dignity and freedom, but under duress, under threat. Yes, we have seen our Congress coerced to put a law on the statute book, not for the benefit of the whole people, but in the interest of a class—a small fraction of the people—and not for their relief from injustice, not to lift a burden from their shoulders, not to break the yoke of poverty, or of unfair wages; no, for

the men in whose interest this law was passed were the most highly paid workmen in the community—receiving twice as much as the average clergyman in our church.

Nor was it to shorten their hours of labor, but to give them power to compel their employers to increase their wages twenty-five per cent.

My brethren, let no man think that I am lowering the plane of the pulpit in referring to this question—that I am bringing politics into the pulpit. No, for this is not properly speaking a party question, but a national one. It rises above party into the region of the welfare of the nation. It is, in fact, a Constitutional question—it concerns the sacredness of the fundamental principles on which our government rests. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the method of legislation prescribed by the Constitution has been set aside; and the *practical* question growing out of that fact, is whether the people shall be roused to a realization of this betrayal of trust, so that by their indignation the wrong shall be rebuked and the Constitutional method re-established.

Is it necessary to establish my assertion that this is not a party question? Then, consider that the law in question was passed by the votes of both political parties, and hence both must share (though not equally) in the responsibility. And let me remind you that the ablest and most influential organ of the party in power described the Labor Law as “legislation extorted by threats,” and declared the whole proceeding “*a national humiliation*,” adding that “to put up with it would be a disaster to the nation incomparably greater than any the strike could inflict,” and further that “if such an outrage can be put upon us unresisted we have lost our republican form of government.” If these statements at all approximate the truth, then we are face to face with an event big with sinister significance to our Republic. The day that law was passed our free institutions were betrayed,—not because the law was wrong in principle (of that I say nothing), but because it was passed under duress, under threat, in the fear of a class instead of in the fear of God; and that was unquestionably a betrayal of our republican form of government. For that day and that hour the government ceased to be a free government and became a government under dictation,—it was legislation in fear of the lash!

It follows that it becomes the duty of the pulpit to focus

attention on this sinister fact and to lift up its voice in its rebuke, if, by God’s blessing it may help to awake the people to the very serious danger that threatens our free institutions in such legislation as this.

3. Turn we now in the third place to our *Stewardship of influence and example as a member of the family of nations*. A nation, like an individual, has a responsibility for the talents it has received from the God of nations,—for its influence, for its power; for its moral judgments, for its fidelity to its obligations to mankind.

The gigantic statue which stands at the entrance to the harbor of New York, holding aloft the torch of Liberty, may fitly represent our great Republic, letting her light shine before the world,—the light of liberty and truth and justice and humanity—all those great principles with which in the providence of God she has been entrusted.

Now the question that America ought to ask herself on this Thanksgiving Day is this: Has she been faithful to this Stewardship of influence and opportunity? Has she let her light shine before the nations of the earth as she ought to have done? Has she held aloft the light of liberty and justice and humanity? Have her moral judgments been true and clear, and have they been so clearly and bravely uttered that they have shone out as a beacon for the guidance of mankind,—a beacon of light in the darkness,—a beacon of encouragement for the weak, a beacon of hope for the oppressed?

Two years ago a tremendous moral crisis broke upon the world. It confronted us. We could not escape it. It challenged our moral judgment. All Europe was plunged into war. It was a war of aggression—a war of conquest. Treaties were ruthlessly violated. Peaceful countries were invaded. The invaders carried fire and sword wherever they went. Cities were given to the flames. Cathedrals were laid in ashes. Inoffensive and unarmed citizens, by hundreds and thousands, were shot to death. Every conceivable outrage was committed. Barbarous methods of warfare were adopted. The deeds of the Goths and Vandals were successfully emulated. And now for more than two years the most awful and destructive war that has ever devastated the world has been raging with ever-increasing fury, with ever-increasing slaughter. Millions of men have

fallen, killed or wounded, in battle, and millions of women and children have suffered want and misery beyond reckoning. What was our duty, my brethren, in the presence of such a desolating scourge?

First, it was our duty to ask who kindled this conflagration? Who planned and prepared this war? Who has been getting ready for it for a generation? The answer was easy. By book and pamphlet, the leaders of one of the nations had avowed the purpose of the war and proclaimed it to the world. There was no concealment of the immense preparation for it, or of the boundless ambition that inspired it. Europe was to be bound to the chariot wheels of that one nation, which in the ultimate end was to dominate the world.

America's first duty, then, was to recognize and declare the responsibility for the war. It was a moral judgment imperatively demanded of her. That judgment could not be evaded—could not be dodged—without moral culpability.

Next, it was our duty to ask, what are these nations fighting for? Which of them is fighting for conquest? Which in self-defense? Which of them represent irresponsible autocracy, and which the principles of democracy? Whose banners stand for personal tyranny? And whose for justice and liberty?

The answer to these questions was also easy. It was plain to see that Belgium and France were battling to defend their soil from invasion. It was plain, also, that France and England stood for liberty and independence and self-government. It was, and is today, a tremendous death grapple between liberty and tyranny, between self-government and autocracy. Again, in view of these conditions, America had a duty to perform. She was called upon to make, and to declare, a moral judgment. It was her duty to declare on which side of this conflict her sympathies were ranged. Was she for the sacredness of treaties, or for their ruthless violation as meaningless scraps of paper? Was she for the little nation struggling against the mighty invader? And did she line up in feeling with autocracy or democracy—with liberty or with tyranny? In other words, were we true to the principles of our forefathers, bequeathed us since 1776, and would we boldly acknowledge our sympathy with the brave peoples who, with unstinted sacrifice and unexampled valor, were fighting *our* battles on the plains of France,—the battles of liberty and justice?

But ought we not to be *neutral* in this great world war? Is not that the policy to which we are committed?

My friends, this is before all things a tremendous *moral* issue—and I hold that just as it is impossible for a true man to be neutral on a moral question, so it ought also to be impossible for a nation to be neutral. And if our policy as a nation has been the policy of neutrality, the sooner that policy is abandoned the better for the honor of the nation and the conscience of the people.

I mean not that we should plunge into this war, but I do mean that we should cease to be dumb spectators of this tremendous assault on liberty and civilization and humanity, and that we should speak trumpet-tongued our indignation against it. The attitude of *moral neutrality* is unworthy of us. It is humiliating. It is the betrayal of our trust. As the mightiest and the wealthiest of the nations who are not engaged in this war, we have a vast moral influence,—and I hold that the whole weight of our moral influence should be thrown into the scale on the side of liberty and justice and civilization and humanity.

Had this been done at the beginning of this struggle when Belgium was invaded in defiance of international treaty obligations, "it would have given us the moral leadership of the world, and made the United States the friend and the rallying center of all the neutral countries." *And it would not have led us into war.* On the other hand it would, in my judgment, have shortened the war.

But we lost our opportunity. We stifled our feelings. We silenced our moral judgment. We tried to hide under a cloak of neutrality—and we lost our leadership among the nations. We became ciphers in the great struggle.

But, my friends, it is not too late—I hope it is not too late—for America to change her policy—to throw to the winds this flimsy cloak of neutrality, and to adopt a policy worthy of her great traditions—worthy of the land of Washington; I mean, that while we are not called upon to participate in this war, we *are* called upon to let all the world know that we condemn the guilty nation that prepared it and precipitated it; that we detest and abhor the brutal manner in which that nation carried it on; and that as the heirs of democratic liberty our hearts are with the nations that are battling with such marvelous heroism against cruelty and tyranny.

A new opportunity presents itself at the present juncture

for the exercise of our moral influence for justice and humanity. To all her other outrages against civilization, the Teutonic powers have now added the infamous crime of enslaving a whole population. They are engaged at the present moment in carrying into captivity 300,000 men (civilians) from Belgium—to be put to involuntary labor in Germany. A while ago their armed legions in the dead of night seized thousands of young women in some of the French towns and carried them into involuntary servitude. "Now the tramp of soldiers is heard through Belgian towns and villages, and women, children and men are kidnaped right and left. It is terrible! Trains roll through Germany packed with human cattle. . . . At this rate we shall witness the wholesale deportation of an entire people reduced to slavery. This indeed is a disaster worse than invasion, worse than the wholesale massacres of Louvain, Taminis, Dinant—worse even than the ceaseless persecutions of the last two years"—worse than the confiscation of Belgium's food—worse than the levy of millions of money upon the pillaged and impoverished towns.

Here, I say, is a new opportunity for America to change her policy of passive indifference. Let her lift up her voice like a trumpet to rebuke with stern indignation this latest outrage upon an inoffensive people! Let the government of our country protest against it so vigorously that the whole world shall hear the echo of our rebuke! Let the people denounce it from one end of the land to the other, as an act of barbarous cruelty worthy of the kings of Assyria 2,600 years ago.

Dare we, as Americans, as descendants of the men who proclaimed the Declaration of Independence, and made it good at Bunker Hill and Saratoga and King's Mountain and Cowpens and Yorktown,—dare we be silent in the face of such a colossal crime against human liberty as this?

Our President has well said, "So far as America is concerned and her influence is involved, justice and liberty should be extended to mankind everywhere."

It is when we let the light of that clear utterance into our souls that we see how impossible it ought to be for America to restrain her indignation in the face of this barbarism of the Central Empires.

Does America indeed stand like that Statue of Liberty holding up the torch of truth and justice for the enlightenment of mankind?

Then let her mighty voice be lifted up for those myriads of helpless people being dragged into slavery! "The only thing" (again I quote President Wilson) "the only thing that will hold the world steady is the all-powerful opinion of mankind." Yes; but this "all-powerful opinion of mankind" must not be stifled—must not be gagged—must not be hushed into silence by the opiate of neutrality! No, it must find expression; it must make itself heard; it must speak as the oracle of God; as the witness of Eternal truth; as the echo of the Divine Justice, to rebuke such tyranny as this—to scourch it with the prophecy of the judgment of the God of righteousness.

In conclusion, my friends and fellow citizens, let me say that this great and powerful American people has come to the parting of the ways. We face a tremendous and fateful issue. We can no longer halt and hesitate between two opinions. We can no longer take refuge in that refuge of lies—a neutral position. We must make our choice.

Are we for liberty or for arbitrary power? For democracy or for irresponsible autocracy? For Christian civilization or for anti-Christian barbarism? Answer in the light of the Lusitania horror, in the light of the Zeppelin murders of women and children, in the light of the alliance between a European power and the Mohammedan Empire, in the light of the unspeakable Armenian massacres, in the light of this latest outrage of which I have spoken today.

I say, without hesitation, the cause of the allies is the cause of personal liberty against irresponsible power; it stands for the freedom and independence of the nations; for the sacredness of treaties; for the accepted principles of international law; for pacific civilization against a civilization based on militarism.

It is the cause of civic ideals against military ambition. It is a war of great principles. It is a fight against such ideas as these:

The end of the State is power;

Might makes right;

The State has no moral obligations;

Military necessity justifies any wrong, any injustice, any cruelty!

Fellow citizens, and fellow Christians, I ask you, Can America hesitate when such an issue is presented?

She did not hesitate in 1822 to declare to the world that she would not tolerate autocratic government anywhere in this hemisphere. She would guarantee the right of self-government from Hudson's Bay to Cape Horn!

Again, in 1850, she did not fear to declare sympathy for the cause of freedom in Hungary—and sent a warship to bring Kossuth to America. Yet, again, she uttered, by the voice of Daniel Webster, her sympathy with Greece in her struggle for liberty. And finally in 1866 she bid the emperor of the French withdraw his legions from Mexico—and her behest was obeyed.

I ask you, then, why should we not lift up our voice now for Belgium and Servia and Poland and France and poor, crucified Armenia? If, when we were small and weak and poor, we stood forth as advocates of liberty and self-government, challenging the assaults of the tyrant upon the rights of men, shall we now play the craven in the face of such gigantic crimes against liberty?

Rather let us follow the example of our sister republic, Brazil, which, in July, 1916, boldly took the side of the allies, declaring, "The tribunals of public opinion and conscience can not rest neutral between law and crime."

I tell you, my friends, it is a solemn and a fateful hour. We face a peril more serious than war—it is the peril of an atrophied moral nature. If we go on witnessing acts of cruelty without condemning them—crimes against liberty without protesting against them—outrages against humanity without denouncing them—the crucifixion of innocence without crying out in horror against it,—our moral nature will lose its fiber, our moral judgment will cease its office, our conscience will become seared as with a hot iron,—our soul will become cold and sordid and selfish. If America, in this crucial hour, commits herself to the guidance of that base and cowardly principle, "safety first," she may save her body, but she will lose her soul! And the loving Christ stands by, asking us to consider "*What shall it profit a nation if she gain the whole world, and lose her own soul?*"

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